Patient Safety through Appropriate Communication
Frederick Memorial Healthcare System

Program/Project Description.
Increasing numbers of deaf and non-English speaking patients presenting to the hospital requiring interpreter services. As healthcare is largely communication dependent, how do we provide care when there is a language barrier? There was little baseline data other than the information of number of those presenting. It was unclear as to how many patients were not getting the appropriate assistance to properly communicate with their healthcare provider. We would be successful if there were no complaints and costs for interpreter services were rising due to appropriate use.

Process.
The Manager working with the Interpreter Services team and others in the organization developed a multi-faceted approach for creative solutions to the problem.

Solution.
The Manager of Interpreter Services worked with the team to develop the following solutions:

1. Multiple requests for Interpreters are made while the Interpreters are with patients. There is a need for someone to assess the priorities and then triage patients and dispatch other Interpreters as needed. Currently the Interpreter who is with a patient is interrupted to try to then arrange coverage elsewhere. This needs to be someone who is knowledgeable about the needs of the patient, understands the requirements by law and knows the available resources depending on the day and time.

2. Technology plays an important role in the Interpreter Services department. There are many considerations that must be made when considering the technological piece including:
   a. Leading the technology direction
   b. Making decisions about the best tools to supplement onsite staff
   c. Implementing new processes and procedures
   d. Researching new IT applications
   e. Evaluation of needs of clinical areas
      i. Currently there are unresolved issues with VRI and the remote site service we are trying to implement at Mt. Airy
      ii. Public Videophone is still under consideration awaiting evaluation and possible implementation
      iii. Educating staff and physicians as to proper usage.

3. There have been a significant increase in the number of requests for teaching and inservicing other department staff following a recent patient who did not receive appropriate Interpreter services. This has raised awareness, however as additional teaching is conducted, others begin to realize how much they don’t know and hence even more teaching is requested.

4. The Cultural Awareness series continues to be taught by the Manager (two sessions). Coordination of the other four components and all the associated details related to outside speakers is rewarding and helpful for staff but obviously time consuming.

5. The Education department created an encounters database to allow the department to capture utilization data which will be analyzed and evaluated for trends.

6. Follow-up of data and information on missed patients needs more timely. A root cause for these issues needs to be determined and actions taken to prevent reoccurrence. Each scenario seems to present new cracks in the system or highlight new areas of lack of understanding on the part of staff and physicians and patients alike.

7. The system for identification and implementation of utilizing bilingual employees needs was developed.

8. Education of the medical staff is needed to encourage them to be tested to improve patient safety as well as for their own protection from liability.
9. Documentation of interpreter utilization in medical record is being formalized and improved.
10. Demographic information in Meditech is being expanded for deaf patients to better capture their preferred method of contact.
11. In the future, staff coverage will be expanded to 24/7 which would allow for some cost savings as contract staff is very expensive.

Measurable Outcomes.
It is still very early but staff are utilizing the tools and the interpreters more often. More data is needed to understand needs and trends.

Sustainability.
Team continues to monitor and review appropriateness and measure effectiveness.

Role of Collaboration and Leadership.
Essential to build internal and external networks of support and guidance. Nursing, physicians and all care providers are expected to utilize the extensive resources provided. Patients are educated as to what interpreting resources they should expect from our organization. Administration and risk management support essential to supporting budgetarily and practically the growth and expansion of interpreting.

Contact Person  Nan Principe Crockett
Title              Manager, Interpreting services
Email             npcrockett@fmh.org
Phone             240-566-3565